

Transcript Charla 005: Nine Questions for the Ninth President

Perette: Welcome to *Fireside Charla* number 5 with Dr. Adela de la Torre, President of SDSU, where we prepare the global citizens, compassionate leaders, and ethical innovators who will solve the world's greatest challenges. Today we bring you a really fun episode: Nine Questions for Our Ninth President, inspired by her recent trip to Asia. SDSU student Ethan Garcia chats with the president about fun aspects of the trip and more serious topics like why international relationships are good for SDSU's stature as a leading global institution, a key pillar in the president's vision. *Fireside Charla* starts now!

Ethan: Before we jump into it I just want to say, I know that you were in Asia. Can you give us a little update on how that went?

Adela: Well, the Asia trip was with the chancellor, Tim White, and nine other presidents. And the focus was really to re-engage with our alumni in Taipei, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and then in Tokyo, Japan. I think it went very well. The alums that we met were so enthusiastic, they were truly our lost Aztecs who wanted to get reconnected. I think what also made it really a wonderful experience was it really showed the the opportunities for us to create programs so that our students here at San Diego State could have some meaningful internship opportunities, as well as create reciprocal relationships with universities and alums in Asia in ways that are really meaningful and impactful for our community.

Ethan: Wow. Okay. That's great. That's such an amazing trip. And for the first question, I just want to ask something fun. Did you eat any interesting food while you were there?

Adela: Yes, I ate a sea anemone, which I'd never had before. It was a very interesting texture, had a wonderful sauce. So that was, that was a first for me.

Ethan: Wow, I can't say I've ever even seen that on a plate.

Second question: From your travels, interacting with the CSU alumni internationally, particularly the SDSU alumni, what did you learn from them about how they feel about their experiences at SDSU?

Adela: Could you repeat the question?

Ethan: Sure. Just from your travels, interacting with the CSU alumni internationally, particularly the SDSU alumni that you met, what did you learn from them about their experiences at SDSU?

Adela: You know, all of them really shared with me how positive their experience was at SDSU and how much they loved SDSU. For some of them- there was a couple that I met in Taiwan, where they met each other at SDSU and were married. And of course, they attribute SDSU to the relationship that they have that's lasted for many, many years. But beyond there are some really deep friendships and in many instances, the experience at SDSU allowed them to move forward in their careers in ways that were really, really notable. I'll give you an example. You know, one of the things, one of the narratives I kept hearing over and over again, was a self confidence that was developed and I think that's similar to a lot of our students, when they say, "what did they get out of SDSU?" It was a capacity to know themselves, to become self aware, and to recognize that they were able to do the job set in front of them in ways that they could never have expected had they not have the SDSU experience.

Ethan: Yeah, I can identify with that too.

Third question: How did your visit help you further think about creating global citizens?

Adela: Well, it's very clear to me that we as a campus need to really create the types of social networks that allow all of our students, alum, and faculty to capitalize on the fact that the world is getting flatter, meaning the relationships that we now need to have as students, faculty, and alums is one that brings us closer together and that there's so many similarities in interest that we really can build on that. So I really did think of this in terms of a need for us to accelerate the opportunities for global exchanges and global opportunities for our students so that it's not something theoretical, it's actually something they can live and experience through the relationships from students who come from across the world and study here on campus to experiences they'll have by studying abroad or participating in internships, whether it's in Asia or Latin America or in Africa. These are really important experiences this day and age. And the more we have those opportunities for our students and faculty, the more impactful I think we will be as an institution.

Ethan: Absolutely.

Question number four: Can you talk to us about how creating binational relationships assists SDSU's stature as a leading global institution?

Adela: Well, we are fortunate geographically in that we live literally on the border. You can take a trolley car and cross at San Ysidro and there you are in Tijuana. But more importantly for many, many years, we have had deep relationships with many of the universities in Baja California and in that capacity as we move forward we can really create the kind of impact as a region, as a powerhouse, a university powerhouse, in a region. And if you think about it, there is no issue on the US Mexico border that isn't a global issue. And probably if we look at our border here in San Diego, we can tackle whether it's dealing with water issues, immigration issues, social justice issues, issues dealing with representation of all types, art, science. If we can successfully tackle those issues, we can replicate them anywhere in the world because there isn't a country that doesn't have the same kinds of issues and needs leadership, intellectual academic leadership and San Diego State, if we can do this effectively, creating the types of synergies, relationship, and systems, we will really make an impact as a national and international institution.

Ethan: Yeah, it's such a unique opportunity too.

Question five: As you think about the importance of students studying abroad, what thoughts do you have on international experience and student growth?

Adela: I think that if you ask any student who's done a program abroad, they will tell you that that has been one of the most transformative experiences in their life. The minute you go into another country that is not your own and live within a community that speaks a different language or experiences a culture that's very different than yours, you're going to learn things that you can't learn in the traditional classroom. So this is an area that I think we've been very strong in, but we can even become stronger in the context that we have an opportunity to deepen those types of experiences for our students. And if we're really focusing on diversity and inclusion, and really talking about global citizenship, we as an institution need to really prepare our students through these very important opportunities, through programs, whether they're binational programs or programs anywhere in the world.

Ethan: Definitely. So when you think of a global network for SDSU, what would you like to see in the future?

Adela: Well, we're going to be launching a strategic plan shortly. And in that strategic plan, I would like to see all of our faculty help envisioning the global plan. We have some natural areas of synergy that have been developed. We have a campus in the country of Georgia, we have our position as a by national institution on the US-Mexico border, we have some important programs that have been developed in Asia. But now is an opportunity for us to really think about where we're going to find our areas of distinction. And in the strategic planning process, we're really going to be mindful of the fact that we have to decide where the areas, whether it's an Asia, whether it's in Mexico, whether it's in another continent, where it is we are going to focus our energies so that we can create the depth of understanding and the commitment to those areas so that we can develop the kind of quality programs we would want for our faculty and our students in our community.

Ethan: Very exciting. And nationally, we have over 414,000 alumni so in what ways can our alumni be proud of what SDSU is achieving today?

Adela: Well, our alumni are very proud of SDSU. So one of the things that I've learned from traveling not only within the San Diego region, but outside and globally is that there's tremendous pride of the brand of the institution of San Diego State University. What I think a lot of people are asking for is greater recognition of the excellence which is the hidden gem called San Diego State University. And part of the role of a president is to make sure that that brand is not only highly regarded, but known for the quality, the product, which is really noted by the success of our students and alumni. And I think the next trajectory will be not only developing this robust strategic plan for the future, which we will work on collectively, but also developing the brand that needs to be known worldwide so that people can fully appreciate the successes that we've had not only in the past, but what we'll have in the future.

Ethan: Definitely. So we're at question eight now. And in five years from now, what would you like to say to yourself about the success that you have helped to achieve at SDSU? So this is kind of like a *Back to the Future* question.

Adela: Well, I do hope, you know, with the efforts that we've had, particularly in areas of diversity inclusion, we really do create the kind of representation that is critical for the success of our students, but really critically important for the region and the country, that we are able to really begin to get the kind of authentic leadership developed so that faculty are really moving forward in a direction that supports the students that we will have in the classroom today and tomorrow. I also think that we have this unique opportunity called Mission Valley. And that's also part of the process of looking at the

future. We have a unique opportunity create a different type of institution with a different type of pedagogy, with a different type of vision that allows us to expand what we have into an area of distinction that in the past we didn't have due to the resources and that constrained us. So we have many, many opportunities here. But those are two that I think should be very, very present, at least emerging in the next five years.

Ethan: It will be really exciting that in five years, when you look back on the progress. As a president of a public university, time is of the essence and it's really important that you take care of yourself. Can you tell us a little bit about what you do to exercise and take care of your health?

Adela: I get up early (when I'm not flying to Tokyo and having to deal with time changes) I get up early and do spinning and bicycling and try to really keep sure that I'm to the extent possible eating a reasonably balanced diet which is sometimes difficult given my my hectic schedule. I also try to make time for my family, my personal life. I think everybody has to balance professional with personal. I have two wonderful daughters, a grandson, I have my husband and I try to make time to make sure that I have conversations with all of them that don't focus on work. You know it's difficult given my job, it's a 24/7 job, but I do think that you need to make time personally, you need to take care of yourself physically, because physically this is very demanding job. And then I think this job becomes one that is manageable from a psychological point of view. You have to remember that there are 24 hours in a day. And in that day, you have to make time for self care. And I think that's true for anyone. That's true for a parent. That's true for a faculty member. That's true for our students. Students also can run ragged, doing multiple things, multiple jobs. And I also say that all of us have to do things that are fun, whether it's watching a Netflix movie that nobody else would watch but you, or reading a book or getting on the cycle and spinning for an hour and listening to music. All of those things are important and all of those are in my repertoire of requirements for self care.

Ethan: Wow. Yeah, that's so important. And I have to admit a lot of those are my go-to when I need some downtime.

Perette: Thank you for joining *Fireside Charla*. Next month, President de la Torre and Luke Wood, Chief Diversity Officer, invite two of our student leaders to discuss compassionate leadership, a key priority for President de la Torre.

You can access transcripts, join the conversation, and connect with President de la Torre at sdsu.edu/firesidecharla. This is Perette Godwin, proud alum, hoping that you are inspired to innovate and have some interesting charlas of your own.

Narrator: *Fireside Charla* is recorded at KPBS studios. Our Senior Producer and Managing Editor is Maria Keckler, our Operations Manager is Lisa Morrisette, original music and editing is by SDSU student Kevin Krick. And for their help and creative input we give special thanks to: Tom Karlo, John Decker, Perette Godwin, Brittany Santos-Derieg, Luis Murillo, La Monica Everett-Haynes, Joyce Gattas, Michele LaGrandeur, Kelly Woodhouse, Jeff Ernst, Scott Hargrove, Sean Hawes, Ethan Garcia, Dan Montoya, Travis McCauley, Luke Wood, Coleen Geraghty, James Tarbox, James Frazee, Cory Marshall, Kao Saechao, Rudy Arias, Uriel Avila Zuniga, Katie May, Angela Odis Brawner, Seth Mallios, and to you for listening and sharing this podcast with others.

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